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ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS
BY ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN

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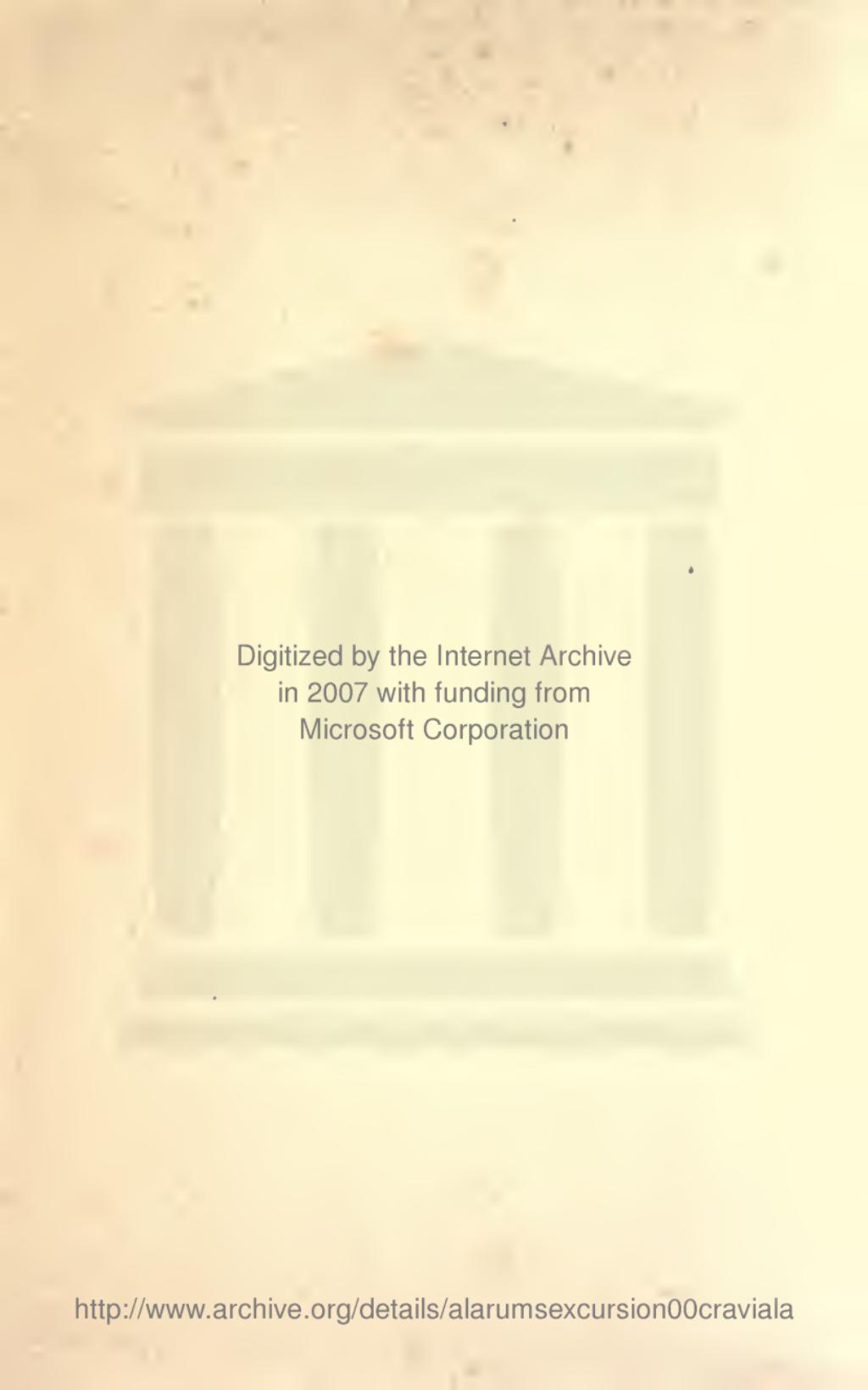


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ALARUMS AND
EXCURSIONS

“ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS”

BY

ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN

In memory of the third of August

MCMX



JOE SKINNER

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

BY

ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the original editions of "Poems in Divers Keys" and "Joe Skinner" are now exhausted, I have made a selection here of some of those poems which appeared in the first volume. "Joe Skinner" reappears *in extenso*.

On a previous occasion I expressed my acknowledgments to the proprietors and editors of those papers by whose courtesy I was permitted to republish several of the shorter pieces. The present volume contains considerable matter now published for the first time, including "Fudge" and "Mukerji Lal," both in a light vein.

ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN.

August, 1910.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Roses and Rue	11
Ave Maria	13
The Reaping	16
The Death of Háfiz	18
The Cross in the Rock	20
The Cross in the Rock re-visited	24
Sallie Dear	25
The Song of the Stars	29
A Fragment	31
Life's Prologue	32
The Call to Arms	33
Billie Boy	35
The Eternal Now	38
Sweet Jennie, with the Laughing Eyes	39
Lingering Leaves	40
Hereward's Appeal to his Mother	41
Tosti's Vision	43
The Last of the English	45
Mukerji Lal	48
Fudge	55
Joe Skinner	78

Roses and Rue*

WHITHER, fair lady ?

Tarry, fair lady !

Life is a garden of roses and rue.

Wherefore, fair lady,

Tarry, fair lady !

I have a word of fair caution for you,
A word of fair caution for you !

Whither so brightly ?

Whither so lightly ?

Fates for a penny, each warranted true.

Tarry, fair lady !

Marry, fair lady,

Life were a garden unworthy of you,
A garden unworthy of you !

Whither fair lady ?

(Hither, fair lady !)

Fain would I whisper one word in your ear :

An he deceive you,

Love you and leave you,

Never was lover yet worthy a tear,
Or worthy a sigh or a tear !

* The fool's song in "The Last of the English."

Thither, fair lady !
Hie thee back, lady.
Life is a garden of roses and rue.
E'en an thou findest
The best and the kindest,
Never could husband be worthy of you—
Be worthy, fair lady, of you !

Ave Maria

(At the gates of a convent an Irish peasant girl is kneeling before an image of the Virgin Mother and Child)

AVE Maria, O Mother o' glory,
 Smile on the infant I lay at your feet.
 Och, but I'll tell ye the truth of the story—
 (See how he looks at ye—croonin' so sweet !)
 Eyes big wid wonder,
 So grave and so pretty,
 All contint under
 Thy smile an' thy pity—
 Ave Maria ! Ave Maria !
 Queen of the Hivins in glory above.
 Both intercedin'
 Thy care an' affection ;
 Arrah, he's pleadin'
 Yer love an' protection.
 Ave Maria. Ave Maria.
 Mother o' Jesus, O Mother o' love.

Mother, I've fallen—but oh ! it's bereft me
 Of hope an' of gladness, of pride an' of name ;
 Blinely I trusted him—gaily he left me,
 Mad an' forlorn wid my grief an' my shame.
 Faith, an' it may be
 Ye scorn me for strayin'—
 But oh ! it's my baby
 Before ye I'm layin'.

Ave Maria. Ave Maria.

Smilin', at pace, wid your own on your kneec.

Sure, an' it's only

A sinner that's kneelin',

But mine lies so lonely,

An' sad an' appealin'.

Ave Maria. Ave Maria.

Hope of the desolate, Star of the sea.

Mother, O Mother, wid pity receive him !

Shield him from slanders, an' evils, an' harms ;

Outcast an' homeless, I love him an' leave him

Warm and at rest in your shelterin' arms.

Happily sleepin',

I tremble to wake him.

Safe in your keepin'—

Oh, tenderly take him !

Ave Maria. Ave Maria.

Only the gloom an' the shadow for me.

Mother, I'm goin',

Heart-stricken an' weepin' ;

Mine was the sowin',

Let mine be the reapin' !

Ave Maria. Ave Maria.

Mother o' mercy, O Star o' the sea.

Mother o' sinners, I'm sure not defilin'

The altar in castin' my all at your shrine ?

Maybe he sees you in dreams—for he's smilin'—

Spurned an' derided—but, Mother, he's mine !

Ah, but you'll bear him •

No shade o' resentment.

Sweet Mother, spare him
His smilin' contentment !
Ave Maria. Ave Maria.
Queen o' the Angels o' glory above.
Troth, with the morrow
An' no man shall scorn him ;
But ah ! wid what sorrow
An' wailin' I'll mourn him !
Ave Maria. Ave Maria.
Mother o' pity, O Mother o' love !

Sweet as the mornin' the sisters shall find him,
Keenin' ochone for the love that was there :
Troth, but they'll fancy 'twas you who consigned him,
Mother o' God, to their keepin' an' care.
Sure, you'll endear him
To all who attend him ?
Mother, be near him
To guard an' befriend him.
Ave Maria. Ave Maria.
Mother o' Jesus, ah, list to my call !
Faith, I'll not falter,
Although the heart's breakin' :
Safe at your altar—
(Oh, wisht !—but he's wakin' !)
Ave Maria. Ave Maria.
Hope of the fatherless, Mother of all.

The Reaping

SWEET, and fair, and all-forgiving !

Leave no platitude unsaid :
Desecrate the sentient living,
Venerate th' insensate dead.
Kiss her hand and smooth her brow !
Could the wrong be righted now !
Could the choice be ours again,
Would the wronged have asked in vain ?

As we went our divers ways
In the morning of our days,
Could we have the night foreseen—
Ah ! and ah ! the might have been !

Never yet was evil righted
Till the last dread debt was paid ;
Never good yet unrequited,
Though a thousand years delayed.
Place the lilies on her breast,
One more erring heart at rest !
Fair white lilies, none too fair
For the sleeper resting there.

Could sad years of tears and shame
One mad hour of sin reclaim,
Or the end have been foreseen—
Ah ! and ah ! the might have been !

On Life's ship, whose chart lies hidden,

Comes a watch, or soon or late,

When the voyager unbidden,

Holds the pilot-wheel of Fate.

Fool and coward, after-wise !

Fume, excuse and moralise !

Ours the choice of wind and course,

Sun and song, or bleak remorse.

Could we then have dared the right

In the blackness of our night,

Or the after-shoal foreseen—

Ah ! and ah ! the might have been !

Sweet, and fair, and all-forgiving !

Leave no platitude unsaid :

Deseccrate the sentient living,

Venerate th' insensate dead.

Kiss her hand and smooth her brow !

Could the wrong be righted now !

Could the choice be ours again,

Would the wronged have asked in vain ?

By the vows we lovers swear,

By the ills ye women bear,

Could this hour have been foreseen !

Ah ! and ah ! the might have been !

The Death of Háfiz

FAREWELL, farewell, ye long-loved walls and towers !
Within your gates all sweet it was to dwell,
And hold long converse with the trees and flowers
When o'er my garden starry evening fell,
And thoughts—too wonderful for song to tell—
Did stir the sleeping fire within my breast :
Shiraz ! old city of my heart, farewell !
His sun is set ! Thy Háfiz goes to rest—
His truest note unsung, his sweetest unexpressed.

Ah see, my brothers ! Darkness lights our sky :
A myriad suns in calm effulgence shine :
Still do I ask—half-fearing : “ Whence came I ? ”
Or “ Whither goes this soul I dare call mine ? ”
Oh, he who here hath drunk of earth’s best wine
Doth know beyond a something grander lies ;
Or who hath tasted once a love divine,
That love profanes to deem its sweetness dies.
Still—from our earthly depths—let’s contemplate the
skies.

’Tis in our work our naked soul appear,
Howso we seek their barenness to disguise ;
And that I am is truly written here—
For him to read who reads with seeing eyes :

From falsehood's dregs know yet the truth will rise,
And vain the hope its presence to conceal—
The wine the singer fain would eulogise
Doth but the dull despair therein reveal.
Through every mask and guise e'er peeps the artless
real.

Herein our hope : no goal by man attained
But lost in sweetness ever as 'twas neared,
No noble end, or seeming summit gained,
But on the instant fairer heights appeared :
And—looking backward—now the mist hath cleared,
We see God's goodness at the journey's end ;
And that we grieved o'er, that which most we feared,
Were but the rungs by which we did ascend.
Then Death, whate'er thy guise, I'll greet thee as a
friend.

The Cross in the Rock

(Land's End, Cornwall)

TILL England's bulwarks sink away,
And fall before the tireless tide,
This cross I carve shall here abide
To mark the troth I plight to-day :
O Love and Right shall rule for aye !
And this shall be the world's refrain,
And never reck what cynics say.

Now let the little cynics chide,
Their sorry jeers I here disdain !
Too long, methinks, I've been their prey,
And follow'd sadly in their train,
With Right my shield their hope is vain—
Though all the Powers of darkness tried,
They should not wrest this joy away !

With one resolve I burst the chain
That keeps me from the living day ;
A grand elixir fires my brain,
And lifts me from a world of clay
To some ethereal distant plane,
Where only Love and Right may reign,
And hold, uncheck'd, their bounteous sway.

For Love and Right shall rule for aye,
 And nothing can their power restrain ;
 Though wrong eclipse them for a day,
 Supreme, enduring they remain.
 Then shall we reck what cynics say ?
 Behold the sign, sweet promised bride—
 Till England's bulwarks sink away !

*“Where lurks the rose that blooms for aye ?
 ’Tis passing madness,” let them say :
 “A thing that lives a summer day,
 And dies unmourned ere eventide :”*
 Well, Time will prove their erring wide !
 An they can such fair love deride,
 What heed shall we to cynics pay ?

A shelter from the cold and rain,
 A rock of refuge—there to hide,
 And find surcease from care and pain !
 With love to spur, with hope to guide,
 And you, dear sweetheart, by my side,
 What fairer joy shall life contain,
 Or earth afford, or Heaven provide ?

The black clouds flash their fires in vain :
 Nor wind, nor storm, nor flood allied
 Shall rend these sturdy rocks in twain.

* * * * *

To hallow thee, sweet promised bride—
 (And shall I reck what cynics say ?)
 Till England's bulwarks sink away,

And fall before the tireless tide,
This chiselled cross shall here abide
To mark the troth I plight to-day.
Behold the sign ! Let laugh who may

Behold the sign ! Let laugh who may—
(And little cynics !—still deride !)
For fifty thousand moons shall wane,
And Titan Powers and Empires wide
To nothingness shall fall again,
Yet still this rough-hewn cross remain
To mark the troth I plight to-day.

And nations, soaring in their pride,
Shall see their vaunted might decay,
Yet still this humble cross retain
The meaning that it bears to-day :
To follow Right, and naught beside—
Ay, though a world the wrong should gain,
And never heed what cynics say.

Tho' Justice for a while delay
When the oppressed to her hath cried,
No righteous tear is shed in vain,
And Time no wrong hath justified.
For every jot unjustly ta'en
A tyrant nation yet shall pay,
And deep the cup of penance drain.

And peoples groaning 'neath her sway,
Shall in their turn as Masters reign—
So runs the long confusing play,
But Time will make the meaning plain :

Though men and nations loom and wane,
Unswerving still the Right shall stay
Through every act, and scene, and day.

* * * *

When nodding Time hath laid aside
His glass and scythe, the poets say,
And our old world hath run its day,
And every leaf is seared and dried—
Upon the ashes of the slain,
Tho' ne'er another life remain,
One single rose shall bloom for aye.

Though every other flower hath died,
And fallen to ordained decay,
This boon she hath, to them denied—
Her sweetness shall not pass away.
Nor shall her power or beauty wane,
Though earth awake to life again
To voice the triumph of her sway.

And Love's the rose that blooms for aye,
And Love shall unresisted reign—
So runs the moral of the play,
And Time will make the meaning plain.
“A thing that lives a summer day !”
Ah, shall we reck what cynics say ?
Behold the sign, sweet promised bride—
Till England's bulwarks sink away !

The Cross in the Rock Re-visited

HAST thou forgotten, old heart—that thy beating
Is steady and slow as a grandfather clock?

Wake from thy slumbers, and give it a greeting!

Twenty long years since our last merry meeting!

And here—as we left it—*the cross in the rock!*

Shame on thee, shame on thee, fickle old master!

Beat as thou didst in the days of thy prime.

Treble thy tempo, sir! Faster, aye faster,

And give me a taste of the once on a time.

Time changeth all things—and, Time, thou art flying!

Yet change not, old heart, an the years weigh on me:

Come, for old love's sake make show of replying!

Only the waves now to echo my sighing,

And only a sob from the heart of the sea.

Shame on thee, shame on thee, faithless old traitor!

Wouldst thou not lessen this weight on my brow?

Let retrospection and sorrow come later,

But spare me a sip of the old nectar now.

Still dull and deaf to my earnest entreating?

Then, heart, I acquit thee of will to offend:

On with thy solemn mechanical beating!

Journeys may yet end in true lovers meeting

(And only God knows how each journey will end).

Still stand'st thou, old rock—Time's ravage defying,

And staunch to the cross I entrusted to thee!

. . . But only the waves to echo my sighing,

And only a moan from thy bosom, O sea!

Sallie Dear

(*In Dartmoor Prison*)

SAY, Sal, old pal, I 'erd a lark strike up 'er merry note,
T'other day,
Down this way.

We was diggin' arter hours 'cos we'd broke the prison
rules,

An' we slacked a bit to 'arken like a pack o' love-sick
fools ;

An' I felt—upon my soul I did—a sinkin' in the throat,
For it brought to mind a memory o' you.

Lord, it's true,
Thoughts o' you

As you was when fust I loved yer, Sallie dear.

We're 'ardened brutes the lot of us, the chaplain tells
us so—

Satan's own,
Christ's out-thrown !

But there wasn't one as didn't wince in all the
ploughin' gang,

Or feel 'is 'art grow softer as that little beggar sang,
An' I blubbered like a babby. Why? It's kinder
'ard to know,

But I sorter felt 'ow wrong I'd treated you.

Straight I did,
An' no kid—*

'Ow I'd changed yer smiles to mournin', Sallie dear.

I see you now in court, old gal, the kiddie on your arm,

Jes' the same,
Brave an' game.

An' the judge's raspin' sentence rushes streamin'
through my ears,

An' I see you—as I seed you then—'alt smilin'
through your tears;

An' I 'ear your whisper: Don't 'ee fret—the boy
won't come to harm,

For the Friend o' little children understands.

Lord, I ain't
No white saint,

But yer kinder brought 'im 'ome then, Sallie dear.

I've worked an' lied in solitood—'alf dreamin' in my
cell,

Livin' through
Days with you.

O God, to walk abroad unwatched! to mock the
mockin' chain!

To drink the air o' liberty! to know myself again!

To feel I own a will once more! I'm ramblin', eh?
ah, well—

Only slaves can teach the free what freedom means.

For no light
Follows night,

But each mornin' brings death closer, Sallie dear.

* And no mistake.

An' so I've lingered 'ere for years—jes' look around
the room !

Think, old wife,
Doomed for life

Where 'uman love ain't ever seen, where speakin'
ranks as crime,

Where one day apes another so we lose account of
time,

Where buried 'ope an' manhood rot inside a prison
tomb,

An' the dreams men dream of freedom reap despair.

Night an' day
Pass away,

But they leave no smiles behind 'em, Sallie dear.

Well then I must ha' sickened, for they sent me out
to plough

'Ere last May,
'Eaven's own day !

Oh, Sal, the dew of mornin' then—the light—the
space—the green—

The air, the sense o' breathin' free, the wonder of that
scene !

The world was made for me that day—it comes afore
me now !

An' I 'ear
Low an' clear

That old song as brought me gladness, Sallie dear.

An' now I'm back in 'ospital. Ah, Sal, still keep my
'and !

I don't fear
When you're near.

It's only when I'm left alone I feel afraid to die,
The white-washed walls, the 'ush, the night, the soul's
despairin' cry,
The tread o' feet, the gloom without, the unknown,
'idden land,
An' the mighty Judge of all we learn to dread.

So I lie
Glad to die,

For I 'old I've bought my freedom, Sallie dear.

Oh, Sal, the hours I've toiled in vain, the broken
years I've seen ;

Sigh an' tear
Anchor 'ere,

But to my dull an' achin' eye there comes a light at
last

Grim skeletons an' shadows of a dimmed an' banished
past !

Ah, Sal, old pal, what might ha' been ! That cry :
What might ha' been !

But 'E 'ears it--for 'E calls me—an' I go !

Ay, sweet light
Crowns my night,

An' the dawn of ages guides me, Sallie dear.

The Song of the Stars

(*Addressed to a disappointed little person in tears—
who pined for “solace”*)

“O nuit ! déroulez en silence
Les pages du livre des cieux.”

—Lamartine.

Look up ! Look up ! Behold the stars,
A myriad suns beyond the sun,
Serene, resplendent, clear !

I.

Too long distress hath been my lot
To fear the things you fear ;
When our brief sun of life hath run
Will shadows disappear.
Then courage, courage, gentle one !
When all is done, when all is done,
There's something yet beyond the sun—
(A myriad worlds beyond the sun !)
Serene, majestic, clear !

II.

Then come what may we'll care no jot !
We—who have sorrowed here,
What little solace we have got
Will hold that little dear.

Or if of solace we have none,
 When all is done, when all is done,
 There's something yet beyond the sun—
 (A myriad worlds beyond the sun !)
 Serene, majestic, clear !

III.

Still hope and labour—waver not
 Though never night so drear !
 Adversity hath stol'n from me
 The solace of a tear :
 Come, blind Fortuna, what's the plot ?
 Bring weal or woe, when all is done
 There's something yet beyond the sun—
 (A myriad worlds beyond the sun)
 Serene, majestic, clear !

IV.

Then like grim warriors of old,
 Let's glory in our scars,
 And read aright, my doubting wight,
 God's emblem of the stars :
 Our highest, best, achieved—behold
 A higher niche and sphere !
 Nor deem the battle lost or won,
 There's something yet beyond the sun
 When our brief thread of life is spun
 And sorrows disappear :
 A myriad suns beyond the sun—
 Serene, resplendent, clear !

A Fragment

IN Life's meridian could we hold
The sun, like Joshua of old—
To keep in check advancing night,
And change our fortune in the fight.
Or could we bid the moon abide
To suit our circumstance and tide—
Had we the power,
Or I, or you
(Who dream away this pregnant hour),
What things we'd do !

Life's Prologue

PLAY well this scene !
Though but a poor prelude to some all-sweet hereafter,
'Tis one scene certain ;
Death comes between
As veiling curtain,
And what will follow—will !
Let it suffice we're here—
Not knowing why, or whence we came, or whither
drifting,
But—being here—let's hold the stage like men,
Scorning base doubt and fear.

Whate'er the part,
How sad and all obscure—or cramped by sorry setting,
We are wisely cast ;
And from these hard conditions best may rise
To dream-seen heights afar :
Then with a heart
Fearless to the last,
Strong, and enduring still,
Let's bear with things that are ;
And—as ourselves—disdaining weak disguise,
Let's enter boldly on this enterprise,
With faith in our good star !

“The Call to Arms”

Hodge Loquitur

’TAINT no sort o’ use denyin’
There’s a summat about dyin’
To the sound o’ bugle calls,
An’ the thud o’ cannon balls,
An’ the whiz o’ bullets flyin’,
An’ the rumble o’ guns firin’
Wot’s consid’rable inspirin’
To the man as stays behind.

Yus, it’s fine an’ fair excitin’,
An’ a thing I takes delight in :
Just the *thought* o’ beggars fightin’
Makes me tingle through and through !
It’s the martial instinct brewin’,
An’ it kinder needs subjuin’,
So my wery best I’m doin’
All sich feelin’s to subjoo.

I’m a chap o’ brawn an’ muscle,
An’ it’s ’ard to ’ave to tussle
'Gin these bulldog inclinations
When sich fever fires the blood,
But the thought o’ my relations—

(In pertikler dear old mother)—
Makes me wishful fer to smother
All sich feelin's in the bud.

Still, there ain't no use denyin'
There's a summat about dyin'
To the rumble o' guns firin'
Wot's *pertikler* inspirin'.

Billie Boy

(*An Aggressive Eulogy*)

'E's a Prod-i-gee,
Our Billie,
So 'e is !

O there ain't a kid in all the world kin brush the boots
o' mine !

My own Billie, little Billie, Billie Boy !

'E's a tidy little trooper—so 'e is !—an' ort to be,
For they say 'e's like 'is father ! 'oo's 'is father ?
Carn't you SEE ?

An' his mother ? Sich a daisy ! An' the kiddie ?
Lor' 'e's fine !

Straight, there ain't a boy in Lunnon but must knuckle
down to mine—

Down to Billie,
Brown-eyed Billie,
Billie Boy.

O there ain't a joy in all the world
Can touch a daddy's joy,
As 'e 'olds aloft in gratitood
'Is fust bright, bouncin' boy ;
An' yer learnt me what it felt like—
So yer did, my Billie Boy !

'E's that clever,
It's amazin' !
So it is !

'E's a handsome little beggar too, the wery print
o' me,

Is my Billy, bouncing Billie, Billie Boy !

'Ow old is *it* ? Is 'E, yer mean ! Bare six weeks
rear'd at most !

But—jes' talk o' breed and muscle ! Now I ain't a
chap to boast,

But 'e'd tackle 'alf a dozen brats, an' wipe the floor
wiv three,

An' I larfs each time I sees 'im—'e's so *wery* much
like me !

Ain't yer, Billie ?
What ho, Billie !
Billie Boy !

'E's that artful,
It's amazin' !
So it is !

'E's a wonder, an' no error, jes' a copy of his dad,
Larfin' Billie, chortlin' Billie, Billie Boy !

For we'd sorter separated, Liz an' me, afore 'e
came,

Though she done 'er best to 'elp me (she were allus
true and game !)

An' I took to drinkin' kindly—an' it kinder drove me
mad.

I was jes' a bloomin' loafer. What ? 'Oo 'auled me
from the bad ?

Why, my Bill, o' course, my Billie, Billie Boy !

O there ain't a joy in all the world
Can touch a daddy's joy,
As 'e sees 'is missus 'old aloft
'Is fust, bright, bouncin' boy ;
And yer linked our lives for ever—
So yer did, my Billie Boy !

The Eternal Now

To dream of a gilded morrow shall we sleep through
the golden day,
And steep for ever our senses in wishes and hopes and
fears ?
E'en as we long and repine the hour hath glided away,
And added its wailing note to the dirge of the wasted
years !

Sweet Jennie, with the Laughing Eyes

No treasured hope or fond ideal
But comes as earnest of a real
That lags behind. . . .

ALONE in the steep, wild, waving grass,
By the four cross roads and the trysting stiles,
'Tis here I would dream of you—

When we were young, sweet Jennie, my lass,
And a world of sighs was a world of smiles,
And the old, old tale was new.

When all that was sweetest we labelled Truth,
And the faith of a child was ours :
Twin spirits of hope in a barque of youth,
Adrift on a sea of flowers.

Entranced by the freshness and fragrance around,
The scent of the hawthorn, the dew on the ground,
The blue of the sky and the lilt of the stream,
I see you again in the heart of my dream :
When hope was our rudder, and love was our star,
And God was a Father who watched from afar.

Ah, Jennie mine own—with the dear trusting eyes,
The faith of a child is the hope of the wise.
The sweetest and fairest thy mind can conceive,
That is Truth, saith my heart . . . Ah !
. . . 'Twas sweet to believe.

Like Lingering Leaves

LIKE lingering leaves that—seeming—fear to fall,
Though seared and stricken by the Winter blast—
So hold we life most precious at the last,
 Like lingering leaves.

Though death—we dare contend—is not the all,
And naught that dies but blooms again serene,
Fain would we linger o'er this closing scene.

And when, perforce, we answer to the call,
And younger players fill our vacant parts,
Fain would we live awhile—within your hearts,
 Like lingering leaves.

Hereward's Appeal to his Mother after his Banishment from England *

NAY, good mother, stay! By Heaven I charge thee.
In thy fair presence will I cast out pride,
And kneel to thee with supplicating hand—
To thee, and thee alone, good mother mine.
Hence do I banish all ungentle thoughts,
And plead to thee as son, thine own true son.
Let mother nature be mine advocate :
And if thy heart must needs condemn me still,
Utter but one word of fair forgiveness,
And frame those lips which I have lov'd so well
To speak my name in tenderness and love.
Then will I face the world with new-found heart,
And banished hope, triumphant as of old,
Forthwith will purge my soul of ev'ry hate
And fast-set bitterness. O mother, speak,
And bid those lips pronounce my name again !
—But “ Hereward,” as they were wont to do,
No more than “ Hereward ” : 'tis all I need
To stir to life a thousand memories
Forever dead, an thou withhold'st thy love.
I touch thy hand. But lift it once in blessing,

* From “The Last of the English.”

This fairest hand that first of all did bless me,
And on the instant ev'ry curse decreed
By King and Holy Church must needs turn traitor,
And join with thee in common sacred cause.
Yet spare me but a word, 'tis all I crave :
O mother, mother, mother, but one word !

Tosti's Vision *

Lord Hereward, but hear me :
These three St. Brice's eves have I beheld
By yonder fen an apparition rise
So like thee now, in ev'ry outward grace,
I well had been deceived—save closer range
Doth show thee older grown and sadder-eyed,
With something less of hope and more of care—
('Twould seem that fell extortioner, old Time,
Had wrested from thee more than was his due).
And thou art clad, as 'twere, in magic mail'
Divinely wrought, as by a sacred hand,
That renders thee invincible to all.
And thou dost stand as one invuln'rable !

And by thy side a woman kneels, who weeps,
And three times tenders thee a cross-crowned sword
Which thou dost wave from thee with sullen mien,
As moved thereby to anger. Then there comes,
As fitting with her action, lord, these words :
*"England hath need of thee, Lord Hereward !
England hath need of thee. Let that suffice !
Thy sword, Lord Hereward ! Thy country calls thee."*
Then England's earth itself doth seem to groan
Beneath some new and alien tyranny,
And join the cry—"England hath need of thee,
Lord Hereward : England hath need of thee." . . .

* From "The Last of the English."

And then, my lord, thy brow unclouded still,
Harold, son of Wessex, kneels before thee,
With bleeding, outstretch'd hands, and cypress-
crown'd,

And cries to thee—" My brother Hereward,
O dear and banished lord, thy country calls thee !
With these white hands of death, I plead her cause.
By Senlac's blood I charge thee, Hereward ! "
O then thy steel'd heart shows like to break,
And tears of anguish fall a-down thy cheeks :
And thou dost lift thy sword and bow thy head,
And earth resoundeth still, and yet again :
" England hath need of thee, Lord Hereward :
Last of the English—Last of the English ! " . . .

. . . Then doth the vision vanish, lord,
And thou art left to solitude awhile.

. . . Then, one by one, thy little chosen band,
And first among them those who close thee now,
Do kneel before thee, as e'en now they kneel
With swords uprais'd—and faerie vesper bells
Joy's tidings ring, " The Wake hath come again ! "
Now once again that nigh-forgotten cheer—
" Ahoy, the Wake ! " " Lord Hereward the Wake ! "
And yoke-bow'd peasants straighten at the cry,
And, sobbing, kiss the ground about thy feet ;
And louder still the news-proud vespers ring,
" The Wake is home again ! The Wake ! The
Wake ! "

The Last of the English

At the Battle of Hastings

ETHELWYN: Hear, my lord, the noble Harold's charge.

. . . E'en as he knelt in that last hour of life,
With hands uprais'd, as pleading England's cause,
So may it be he kneels before thee now
In unseen supplication yet again.

An I could voice the glories of that hour,
Or weave with magic words a deathless tale
To animate an England yet to be,
And stir her sons through centuries unfurl'd,
Then but the name of Harold should suffice
To call that spirit of resistance forth
In peerless majesty, undimm'd by time.

Then should the cry of "Senlac" steel men's hearts
To battle fiercest in the blackest hour,
To stand defiant 'gainst unnumber'd odds,
And fight again as those brave Saxons fought,
E'en to the last fierce rally of despair.

My lord, as noble Harold charg'd thee then
—The blinded, stricken Harold, dauntless still,
Ne'er so undaunted as when England fell,
True King of men, thrice royal in defeat,
By nature crown'd and sceptr'd, England's lord—
So do we charge thee now, in Harold's name,

To conjure forth that spirit yet again.
By Senlac's blood we charge thee, Hereward . . .

HEREWARD : "By Senlac's blood."

ETHELWYN : 'Tis Harold's word, my lord.
Amid his twenty thousand English slain,
In death's prophetic hour, he charg'd thee thus :
"O dear and banished lord, thy country calls thee :
With these white hands of death I plead her cause.
By Senlac's blood I charge thee, Hereward !"
As then he knelt in agony of death,
So here perchance he kneels to thee again.
Thine answer, Hereward ? What answer ?

The Last Resistance of Hereward

TORFRIDA : . . . Yet he yielded not . . . still he
scorn'd to yield !

O great and fitting end ! These last of all—
These last proud, silent Englishmen—selfless,
Grim, adamant, defiant, scornful still.

"These proud, unconquerable Saxon fools."

Well didst thou sound their praises, Taillebois, then !

But twelve surviv'd, yet did they scorn to yield.

So will our children's children voice our tale,

So will their children's children tell again

How once a little band of Saxon men,

A thousand strong in all, did hold at bay

The flower of Norman chivalry.—Their sires,

Rough men of their own blood, who fought and died

To free them from oppression, and bequeath

A priceless heritage that should endure.

Then, when these French and English fight as one,

Will Normans joy to tell the tale anew :
How dearly, dearly did their fathers pay
For that ill-omen'd and untimely boast,
That England's heart was broken at a blow—
This English heart, indomitable still :
How that their iron King, this Conqueror,
Groaning in spirit for his Norman dead,
Turning his back on Ely, sick-at-heart,
Did pray men bring the Wake to him alive
That he might view a sterner than himself,
And court his fealty in terms of peace.
O nobly done ! This last, the best of all :
But twelve surviv'd, yet did they scorn to yield !

Mukerji Lal

HAI, hai ! Hullo there, Mukerji !
 Hai, hai, Mukerji Lal !
 My wholly delectable, highly respectable, encyclopedi-
 cal Mukerji Lal.

He was a Bengali Babu
(Hai, Babu !)
 Mukerji Lal was his name. (*What a name !*)
 It's a frankly impossible name.)
 If you know Lord Macaulay's strong views on
 Bengalis,
 My own are precisely the same,
*Saccha hai !**
 My views are *precisely* the same.
 Your Bengali Babu is clever (too clever).
 He's able, he's subtle, he's deep,
 With the brain of a Leicestershire fox on the run,
 And the heart of a Galloway sheep
(Ar-e Bhai !)†
 The heart of a Galloway sheep.

Mukerji Lal was *my* Babu.
(Hai, Babu !)

* That's the truth.

† Hullo, brother !

Thirty rupees was his pay—(monthly pay.
It's absurdly inadequate pay)—
But Lal's education exceeded his station,
For Lal was a full-fledged B.A.
(Ho, ho !

A full-fledged Calcutta B.A.)
Yet Lal was excessively humble (too humble)
And always referred things to me,
Though I am a duffer who never could suffer
The thought of a beastly degree.
Bless you, no !
Away with your beastly degree !

Though I've long since forgotten
What little I knew,
And my Latin's so rotten
I couldn't construe
A passage from Cæsar for fifty rupees,
Trust Mukerji Lal, with consummatest ease,
To rattle him off—(Hai ! Couldn't you, Mukerji ?)
Gabble him off just as fast as you please.
Hai, hai ! Mukerji Lal,
My encyclopedical Mukerji Lal,
My wholly delectable, hair-splitting, timorous, humble,
grandiloquent Babu !

Of the awe I inspired in that Babu B.A.
It were boastful to speak, though I'm tempted to say
That I frequently wished my good mother could see
The TREMENDOUS effect of my “ Hai, Babuji ! ”
(The unfailing effect of my “ Hai, Babuji ! ”)

How he sprang to his feet, how he rushed to obey
 My contrariest whim in the *cheeriest* way—
 Such a cheerful, bright, breezy, well-disciplined, affable,
 dutiful, beautiful Babu !

In my own sub-division of Chhothapegapore
 (I'm the deuce of a fellow in Chhothapegapore)
 I'm the Barra Bahadur, the dominant race,
 I'm the one out-and-out-and-out *Sah'b* in the place—
 I'm the Sirkar, the Empire, the Lord knows what
 more,
 And Mukerji Lal, as I've mentioned before,
 Was my highly reliable, wholly unmatchable, quite
 irreproachable Babu.

With his natty white socks and his natty white skirt,
 With his goggles, umbrella, immaculate shirt,
 From his shoes (patent shoes)
 To his cap (smoking cap)
 You *never* encountered the likes of the chap :
 So diffident, erudite, smiling, alert,
 A *Crichton* of Babus, I'm proud to assert,
 And my personal, very own, only one, special one,
 private, particular Babu.
 (Quite indispensable Babu.)

But Mukerji Lal went to England
 (*Old England*)
 To read for the Bar his intent (rash intent.
 I helped to support the intent).
 Now no more “ Babu, hai ! ” but “ Old fellow, good-
 bye ! ”

I was sorry when Mukerji went—
So I was.

(I regretted the money I'd lent.)

And I gave him a *chit* * to my people. (Nice people,
Respected at Clacton-on-Sea.)

And I asked them to take up the youth for my sake.
A word was sufficient from me.

(*Bless their hearts!*)

They were always devoted to me.

And Mukerji's luck was tremendous—
(*Tremendous!*)

Exceeding all rational bounds—normal bounds—
(Increasing by kangaroo bounds.)

His income from prizes of all sorts and sizes
Amounting to hundreds of pounds

(Think of that !)

To hundreds and hundreds of pounds.

For Mukerji went up to Oxford—(*My Oxford*—
The Oxford that once sent me down).

I've his photograph here with a cock-a-hoop leer,
And a new academical gown

(Bless the boy !)

In his (*Oxon.* B.A.) hood and gown.

And his 'Varsity vogue was stupendous—
Stupendous !

And wisely Lal followed his star—(lucky star !

I once pinned *my* faith in a star !)

Now resolving to cram for the I.C. exam.,

* A letter.

And most prudently shelving the Bar.

(Khabardar ! *)

It's a risky profession, the Bar.)

And he now and then journeyed to Clacton (First,
Clacton !)

Where mother would press him to stay,
And he really *was* kind to my people, I find,
In a Barra Bahadur-like way
(Hang his cheek !)
In a cold, distant, dignified way.

I'm a *very* big pot, sir, in Chhothapeglore
(I fancy I've touched on the matter before),
But it mortifies me

(With some cause, you'll agree)

To be a mere *cipher* at Clacton-on-Sea.

(I'm the veriest *shrimp*, sir, at Clacton-on-Sea !)

Whilst Lal—(there's the rub)—might be Chief of
Mysore,

Of Kashmir, Baroda, and Lord knows what more.

He's the deuce of a dog.

He's a Rajah *incog.*—

Not the *least* like a Bengali Babu.

And ever Lal flourished in England

(*My England*)

And passed the I.C.S. exam. (All salāam !

That's the Indian Civil exam.)

I was *not* overjoyed (I was very annoyed)

That's the kind of a fellow I am

* Take care !

(*Lal, Saldam !*)

It's a dog-in-the-manger I am.

For mine is the Junior Service (slow service !),

The *un*-covenanted I.C.

And the letters C.S. always rouse, I confess,

The profoundest resentment in me—

(So they do)

Unquenchable envy in me.

And now he's my Barra Bahadur

(Bahadur !)

Mr. *M.* Lal, C.S., District Judge. (*Vide* press :

"Our eminent Indian Judge.")

And I'm here as before, back in Chhothapeglore,

A hard-pressed old Government drudge

(So I am),

I'm an over-worked, underpaid drudge.

But Lal is exceedingly gracious (too gracious),

With ever a kind word for me,

And who knows but one day Mr. Mukerji may

Be most useful at Clacton-on-Sea ?

(That's my dream,

To be *someone* at Clacton-on-Sea !)

For my social ambition's enormous

(E-normous !)

And when we retire 'twill be nice (rather nice—

An English July *can* be nice)—

To have a "position"—(My dear wife's ambition)—

A few *chits* from Lal will suffice

(Bless you, yes !)

A word from old Lal will suffice.

And you'll see to it, Mukerji, won't yer? (Lal, won't
yer?)

Though cunning and clever and deep,
You've a heart after all, and I herewith recall
My remark about Galloway sheep
(So I do)

Oh, they're *devils*, your Galloway sheep!

So it's Ho, Saláamut, Mukerji Lal,
My eminent *protégé*, Mukerji Lal,
My late unimpeachable, ex-irreproachable, still indis-
pensable Babu.

“Fudge”

An Eerie Tale

The three mystic letters “S.P.R.” stand for the Society for Psychical Research. Though the members of this Society have treated me a little unkindly in the present instance, I entertain the profoundest respect for them.

Shall we make a start?

Good!

PREAMBLE.

Mr. Justice Fudge
Is a very learned Judge
Of exceeding erudition, most profound in legal lore.
“Fudge on Contracts,” be it noted,
Is a standard work and quoted
By the cream of learned Counsel twenty times a day
and more;
Whilst of course his “Jurisprudence”
Is the *text* book for all students,
And his “Roman law” a classic, which they one and
all adore.
Do you know it?
Bound in leather, red calf binding, six-and-eightpence?
(I’ve a copy, slightly spotted, going cheap at three-and-four.)

* Would you know him, sir ? Then read your
 “ Fudge on Criminal Procedure.”
 What a book, sir ! Did you *ever*
 Meet with anything so clever ?
 Would you shine as an Attorney ?
 Would you steep yourself in crime, sir ?
 Would you kill a weary Journey ?
 Would you merely pass the time, sir ?
 Would you pause in some endeavour
 To arrive at sound conclusions,
 With a brain befogg’d by wrangles,
 In a hundred legal tangles ?
 Go to Fudge, sir ! That your plan, sir !
 Fudge the Judge, sir ! He’s your man, sir !
Fudge will dissipate confusions,
Fudge will never fail you—NEVER !
 Follow Fudge, sir ! (when you can, sir).
 Thomas Fudge, sir.
 Justice Fudge.

If—(with shocking inhumanity
 To wound His lordship’s vanity)—
 Our artist WILL present him
 In this manner indefensible :
 A mass of gross rotundity,
 And pudding-faced inanity—
 Of course we can’t prevent him, sir.
 (Of course we can’t prevent him.)
 STILL—(ignoring such frivolities
 Entirely reprehensible)
 Pray take a view more sensible,

* Verses omitted in recitation.



SIR THOMAS FUDGE

And note his *nobler* qualities :
What wisdom ! What profundity !
What depth ! What breadth ! What sanity !
What dignified jocundity !
What courtly, suave urbanity ! *

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

Though pecking daws,
With scratching claws,
Would fain reveal his faults and flaws
Behold unveil'd for your applause
A pillar of society :
Sir Thomas Fudge,
The learned Judge,
And acme of sobriety :
Expounder of his country's laws,
Chock full of maxims, moral saws,
And what rude schoolboys term "pi-jaws"
In infinite variety.
Why care two straws for *fool's* guffaws ?
Alack, good sir, 'tis here we pause
To contemplate the awful cause
Of such excessive piety :
His wife—Susannah, Lady Fudge !
The partner of this worthy Judge,
And *prism* of propriety.

* The very PICTURE over-awes !—
 (Indeed, the way your artist draws
 Her *ladyship* completely thaws
 Our late displeasure),
 We get the Cæsar eye and nose,
 The Bismarck chin, the Cromwell pose,
 The set expression—“Come to blows !”
 In startling measure.*

CHAPTER II.

Alas, that Fudge (that gun of law)
 Should prove himself a man of straw,
 And hold in self-belittling awe
 Another’s daughter !
 Yet underneath her ruling thumb
 Sir Thomas Fudge would aye succumb
 With acquiescence blind and dumb,
 And weak as water.

Her views were his, and his delight
 Seem’d ever to acclaim her right.
 Let her declare that black was white
 He’d not refute it.
 Or let her hold the moon was cheese,
 Or pigs could fly—such views as these
 Would but have won his “As you please !
 I’ll not dispute it.”

Her ev’ry hobby—(she’d a lot)—
 He would subscribe to on the spot :
 And, whether he approv’d or not,
 No man seemed firmer.

* Verses omitted in recitation.



LADY FUDGE

"Ay, let her change them ev'ry day
In her inconstant woman's way,
He'd change his too," I've heard him say,
"Without a murmur."

He never swore—though oft provok'd—
He never laughed, he never joked,
He never drank, he never smoked—
(She *was* a tartar !)
He never jibb'd—though tempted sore—
But patiently his yokedom bore
For twenty solid years or more,
A silent martyr.

As president or shining light
Of causes *she* approv'd as right
You might have heard him any night
Her views expounding—
On women's wrongs or women's rights,
Theatre hats or chorus tights,
Or Tooting young men's social nights,
With skill astounding.

And if some wonder'd—(well they might !)
Why one so skill'd and erudite
Revers'd his judgments night by night,
His fame belying :
One glance at Lady Fudge reveal'd
A fact she never once conceal'd
—The wisely power her will could wield
'Twere vain defying.

Of all the fads she ever had,
And she had many—(good and bad)
Her latest is the only fad
That *nothing* shatters.
Since occult lore of ev'ry kind
First occupied the lady's mind
No *jot* of pleasure can she find
In mundane matters.

But shade and spook and eerie sprite
(Who rap and tap, and read and write),
Clairaudience and second-sight
Completely rule her.
You know your Browning, so can judge
When mediums allied to Sludge
Are those most sought by Lady Fudge,
They—mostly—*fool* her.

Her strangest whim would seem to be
What psychic terminology
Dubs “Double Personality.”
You know the theory ?
How disembodied souls obtain
Possession of some mortal's brain,
And taste life's fickle joys again.
(It's awfu' eerie !)

Thus burglars, seized with sudden qualms,
May spend their lives disbursing alms,
Or singing penitential psalms—
(Most doleful singing).

Maintaining with no little pride
But for that still small voice inside,
Their "Dæmon" guide, they might ha' died,
Inertly swinging.

So, too, the dearest, gentlest soul,
Obedient to some sprite's control,
May, willy-nilly, play the *rôle*
Of dashing hero.
Or palest curate, meek and shy,
With kindest heart and mildest eye,
May serve to harbour by-and-bye
A fiddling Nero.

CHAPTER III.

Sir Thomas Fudge—(since time began
There never was a wiser man)—
At last embark'd upon a plan
To burst the bubble.
For week on week he work'd it out,
And turn'd and twisted it about
'Till even he had little doubt
'Twould end the trouble.

Though pessimists are prone to say
A *Lord* of time must needs obey
Time's dreadful ordinance, decay,
Quod omnes rexit.
Observe how in this shifting play
The meanest dog may have his day,
And wag his tail—(once, anyway)—
Before his exit.

The sequence of my logic here,
I entertain a passing fear,
May not appear
Unduly clear
On close inspection.

(Indeed, it just occurs to me
'Twixt premiss A and premiss B
Your stern logician may not see
The least connection.)

However, what I'm striving at,
The point that I'm arriving at,
And diligently driving at
With *no* misgiving,
Is, briefly *this* : though life be flat,
Unprofitable and all that,
How weary, stale our habitat,
It's worth the living.

And there you *are*, sir ! Q. E. D.
If you agree, and I agree,
Contradicente Nemine,
What point in moralizing more ?
We've skirted round
Some pleasant ground,
And here we are again, you see,
Precisely where we were before !

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

* An I could climb to heights sublime,
 And breathe Parnassian air,
 It were a crime with puny rhyme
 To taint a theme so rare—
 (That's trite and true, but rather too
 Suggestive of a pantomime).
 We'll start again :

'Twas in the prime of summer time—
 (No, no, that's Hood, so *that* won't do !)

'Twas in the Long Vacation time—
 (That's *rather* good, I think, don't you ?)
 We'll let it go !
 Just once again : *

'Tis in the Long Vacation time,
 And Lady Fudge—(howbeit *I'm*
 Disposed to dub her crabb'd and sour,
 And twenty summers past her prime)—
 Is in the very *pink* and flower
 Of pride and plenitude of power.
 Arriving home, in Paquin frock
 And Daimler car, at twelve o'clock,
 Right pat with Big Ben's closing chime,
 My lady—(Note the eerie hour)—
 Gives one clear, loud, decisive knock :

* Verses omitted in recitation.

Rat-tat-tat-tat !
No more than that—
(That's one, not four)
Nor less
Nor more,
Just—one—loud—knock :

A sharp, emphatic, autocratic, fierce, mordacious, pervicacious, variegated, concentrated, complicated, cultivated, most expressive, most aggressive, overbearing, self-reliant, dominating, aggravating, devil-daring, world-defiant, irritating, vicious, grating, cross, capricious, altercating, world-suspicious, world-dictating, calm, judicious, elevating, bold, ambitious, penetrating, cold, officious, calculating, nice, precise, discriminating, critical, pervestigating, sudden, swift, reverberating, "Only DARE to keep me waiting," "INSTANTLY this door unlock!"—Subtle, sinister, satanic, trenchant, truculent, tyrannic, influential, consequential, Mede and Persian, harsh, Draconian, viraginian, Amazonian, grim, severe, loud, unethereal, prim, austere, proud, managerial, vain and mundane, most material, *most* unfurtive, *most* unmystic, self-assertive, egotistic, unmysterious, though abnormal; though informal, wholly serious; frigid, rigid, MOST imperious : "Open—Sesame —this—instant—or—I'll—show—yer !" —sort of knock.

Hold me redundant, sir,
Superabundant, sir,
Breaking all rational bounds of tautology :

Not one word can I change, sir,
 Re-call, re-arrange, sir,
 Or syllable add in the way of apology—
 So *much* is engrain'd, sir,
 Explain'd and contain'd, sir,
 Compress'd and convey'd in her Ladyship's knock.

CHAPTER II.

She pauses a spell.
 She knocks once again :
Rat-tat-a-tat !—merely rat-tat-a-tat, sir.
 Yet how can I tell,
 How *attempt* to explain,
 What words in the world can *begin* to express
 All the wonderful things that she puts into that, sir ?
 The infinite subtlety, art and finesse !
 The delicate shades and the exquisite hues,
 The pregnant reflections, the personal views,
 The —
Rat—tat—a—tat !

Now your honest virago : “ I'll show 'em what's what !
 “ *I'll* read 'em a lesson. I'll serve it 'em hot !
 “ *I'll* fathom their game and improve on their plot !
 “ *They'll* pretty soon see if I'm mistress or not !
 “ To keep ME here knocking, and knocking, and knocking—
 “ It's shameful, disgraceful,
 “ It's scandalous, shocking !
 “ I don't care a jot *what* excuses they've got,

"Just as sure as I live I'll discharge the whole lot !

"If I stood to be *shot* they should leave on the spot !

"I *never* did—NEVER !—I—"

RAT ! TAT ! TAT ! TAT !

"*That'll* wake 'em all right ! *Now* to let myself go !

"*Now* to tell 'em some things that they're wanting to know !"

(It was always extremely distressing to me
On the smallest untoward occasion to see
How excessively vulgar my Lady could be.)—
"I'll show that old Parker if two and two's four !
"I'll show James and Thomas the way to the door !
"I've got just a *few* observations in store !
"We'll see if they'll let *this* occur any more !"
Rat-tat-tat-tat ! Rat-tat-tat-tat !
"I'll show 'em ! I'll teach 'em ! I'll—
RAT—TAT—TAT—TAT !

Rat-a-tat ! Rat-a-tat ! From the roof to the ground
Not a light in the house, not the ghost of a sound,
Not the mew of a cat, not the bay of a hound,
Not the stir of a mouse—
Only silence

—Horrible, mystical silence !

Ominous, terrible, heart-chilling silence.

Darkness unspeakable, darkness funereal—

Darkness . . . and silence,

Darkness and silence.

Rat ! Tat ! Tat ! Tat !

(She's at it again !)

Forte, crescendo, crescendo, fugato.

Misterioso, piano, staccato.

Rat-tat-tat-tat

The eternal refrain—

Patient, persistent, incessant, and rat-like,
Silky, smooth, stealthy, dispassionate, cat-like,
Honest, aggressive, ferocious and dog-like,
Jumpy and jerky and sudden and frog-like,
Coaxing, cajoling, insulting, offensive,
Fearless, defiant, alarm'd, apprehensive—
Ev'ry kind in the *world*, plus that PERSONAL touch,
The militant ego—(which meant very much !)

Another brief spell, sir,

Then at it again !

She tugs at the bell, sir.

(That's equally vain !)

She tugs and she hammers, she rings and she drums,
But nobody answers, and nobody comes.

For twenty good minutes (indeed, rather more)
She bullies and bangs that redoubtable door.

And the knocker—an imp with a horrible grin,
The very quintessence of metallised sin—

In a self-possess'd, vulgar, impertinent way

Just smiles all the while—a most *maddening* smile—
As much as to say—"Here's the devil to pay !

"Here's a sight worth a twenty mile walk any day !

"Keep *at* it, my Lady ! Bray-vo ! 'Ip-'urray !

"He, he, he, he ! You're as good as a play !

"Strike me dumb if you ain't just as——"

Rat-tat-tat-tat

To a tremolo bar, on a lime-spotted stage,
To rescue the dame from her pitiful plight,

'Twould be just about here that your "star" would appear

With a Perseus-like spring from the depths of the night.

Observe, then, who comes, sir, and weep at the sight :

. . . A poor little page

Of the tenderest age

A weary wee wizened wan woe-begone wight,

A scared little shivering shrimp of a mite,

(In his little py—"jams" and the deuce of a fright)

Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat! Clang! Rat-a-tat-tat!

With his heart in his mouth, down the long, winding flight,

Like a mouse in a cage

Just about to engage

In a Hobson's choice chat

With a conscienceless cat

He haltingly, fearfully, stealthily nears

That detestable door with its myriad fears—

Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat!

Pulls the bolt, lifts the latch, turns the key, lights the light,

And tremblingly face Her ladyship's rage.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

What my Lady had said to the poor little "Boots"

—(If the Fates had decreed, and my Lady had said it)—

Of course no one knows,

But it's fair to suppose

'Twould have shamed an Instructor of Cowboy
Recruits,

And done the most season'd of Troopers much credit.
But before the good lady can get in a word,
That absurd little page—(and he's quite too absurd)—
By the tale that he tells, the *absurdest* of tales,
In a tick takes the wind from her Ladyship's sails.

If you pick up the thread at the point where you read
How disorporate sprites on occasion have led
The most commonplace souls
To assume divers *rôles*
As remov'd from their natural bent as the Poles,
I don't think you can fail
To detect in the tale
Which that poor little "Buttons" attempts to unfold
—(Before the good lady can "start in" to scold)—
An "S.P.R." case worth its burden in gold.

Though the tale lacks coherence and sequence and
grammar,
Simplicity, elegance, eloquence, glamour,
Though he fumbles and splutters, and stumbles and
stutters,
And the point is the *last* thing he thinks of arriving at,
You will see in a trice what the wee mon is driving at.

"James and Thomas," he swears,
"Are in hiding upstairs,
"Barricading their bed-rooms with tables and chairs,
("And nothing will make 'em come out," he declares.)

"They was speechless with dread, as they'd both of
'em said,

"So *someone* must answer the door in their stead."

Thence confusion had spread :

Little Jenkins has fled.

"Mr. Parker"—the butler—"is under his bed.

"Mrs. Joyce in 'isterics, an' light in 'er 'ead,

"The cook in a faint, the canary bird dead,

"Bruce, Emma and Mary is scared into fits,

"AND THE MASTER, SO 'ELP 'IM, IS OUT
OF 'IS WITS!"

For hour after hour, with a quick, nervous tread,
He had paced up and down

In his old dressing-gown—

(A dark woollen grey, with a border of red)—

And a tea-cosy perch'd on the top of his head

Which he wore

What was more

"Kind o' broadside afore

"Same as Hadmirals did when they wasn't ashore."

And the language he used at the *top* of his voice !

—He could only remember just two or three bits :

"*Bassano, Marengo, Wagram, Austerlitz*"—

But he'd heard Mr. Parker inform Mrs. Joyce

"They was quite the most hawfullest swear-words in
French

"As Sir Tummus 'ud *never* ha' used on the Bench."

Would my Lady go up ? "She was dead sure to
find 'im,

"With one 'and on 'is chest an' the other behind 'im,

“ Still shoutin’ them French words, an’ scowlin’ most
 ’orrid,
“ And still up and down,
 “ Up and down,
 “ Up and down,
“ With ’is good Templar sword ’anging under ’is gown,
“ An’ a new fancy curl ’anging plumb down ’is forehead.
“ Whist !
“ My lady could ’ear ’im ! . . . ‘ *Tout ça me rend fou !*
“ ‘ *A bas les Anglais ! Quatre Bras ! Waterloo !*
“ NOW she could see what ’e’d told ’er was true !”

CHAPTER II.

’Tis in the Long Vacation time,
(*Another month—the same old scene*)
And Lady Fudge, in Paquin frock
(The very newest shade in green)—
Arriving home at ten o’clock,
Right pat again with Big Ben’s chime,
Gives one sweet, soft, persuasive knock—
Rat-tat-tat-tat !
No more than that.
Nor less, nor more,
Just one soft knock—
A sycophantic, sympathetic, lowly, meek, apologetic,
Soothing, smoothing, sweet, poetic,
Soft, sabbatical, ascetic,
Simple, childlike, bland, ingenuous,
Non-resisting, anti-strenuous,
Acquiescent, over-pleasant, “ Thank you, Parker, at
 your leisure ! ”

“Don’t mind *me*. I’ll wait with pleasure !”
“Only if you’re *passing*, Thomas, turn the key please !”
sort of knock.

CONCLUSION

What changed her ?
Who changed her ?
How came it about ?
Though my theories you’d rout,
My hypotheses flout,
Though my facts you’d impugn and my evidence scout,
I submit there can be no scintilla of doubt
But that Nap—

Hullo ! Steady !

I can’t make it out.

There are one or two points . . . Let me see . . .

Let me think . . .

Why the deuce does old Parker consistently wink,
And why does James smile in that singular way
When I go to enquire, as I do ev’ry day,
How my lord is progressing ?—(He’s daily progressing).
And Thomas, that pattern of servants and men,
With the face of a sphinx too—
I’m certain he winks too.

(I feel *sure* I’ve detected a wink now and then.)

And it’s very distressing—extremely distressing,
Because I have studied the case through and through
From ev’ry conceivable sane point of view,
And I’ve sent a report to the “S.P.R.” too—
(Just giving the facts, and suppressing the names,

Supported by Parker, Joyce, Thomas and James)—
And I'm *certain* my thesis is out-and-out true.

The symptoms are these, Sir :—(I'll try to explain)
One moment he's formal and normal and sane,
As calm, as judicious, as deep and as clever,
As cool, as collected, as charming as ever,
But let him be vex'd or perplex'd, and the next
You'd never believe 'twas the same fellow—*Never!*
He will fume, he will rage, he will storm and rampage.
He will growl like a bear, he will stamp and he'll swear
(In extremely good French as my Lady is there).
And the strange point is this—that if she *isn't* present,
He is always extremely good-natured and pleasant.

But let *her* oppose him—one *word* from his wife,
In the least degree spiteful or peevish or horrid,
And before one says knife
Just as sure as your life
Plump goes that curl down the little man's forehead !
What is more, sir, before one more syllable's said
That *cosy* is perch'd on the top of his head !
So it seems to me clear, just as clear as can be,
That it's—*Rat, tat, tat, tat!*
Who the dickens is that ?
. . . A telegraph boy with a message for me.
From those “S.P.R.” fellows, sir ! *Now* we shall see !

What the deuce do they mean by the single word,
“Fudge”
When I *purposely* held back the name of the Judge ?
I wonder . . .

Joe Skinner, or The Man with the Sneer

"But, woe the while ! our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits."

Julius Cæsar, Act I., Scene III.

PART THE FIRST

The girl with the squeaky soprano next door—
(With her trills and las
And do re mi fas),—
I was horribly tempted to smother,
And the brute with the flute—(who resides on my
floor)

I'd have strangled with joy, with delirious joy,
Though I knew him to be a most lovable boy,
And exceedingly kind to his mother.

Comic song bawlers had passed by the score,
Coster musicians, street organs galore,
Till human endurance could bear it no more.

I had started to write—it was just after ten—
At peace with the world, in my snug little den,
With a beautiful thought at the tip of my pen.
And now it was four—
(My alarum said four)
And I hadn't begun,
Not one stroke had I done,
And my little alarum was pointing to four !

Then I started again ! I had written one line
(Which my landlady said was "uncommonly fine,
"An' worth any *two* of the lodger's upstairs,
"With *all* 'is superior graces and airs")
When—just as the clock was about to strike five,
By all the untrumpeted martyrs alive
If a STREET SINGING MENDICANT didn't
arrive !

He was sturdy and strong,
Yet he hobbled along
At a tortoise-like pace,
(As though weary and worn)
With a sneer on his face
Which was quite out of place
In the case of a mendicant singer forlorn :
A combative sneer,
Saturnine and aggressive,
And wholly expressive
Of arrogant scorn,
Of taunting, inimical, insolent, impudent,
Militant, menacing, arrogant scorn.

With a leer
And a sneer,
Saturnine and aggressive,
Offensive, forbidding and proud,
In a voice penetrating
(And rasping and grating)
Untutored, discordant and loud,
He sang to the gibes and the sallies and jeers
Of your blatant Bank Holiday crowd—

Of your low-minded, frivolous,
Gutter-born, gutter-bred,
Blatant Bank Holiday crowd.

Then the girl with the squeaky soprano next door
And the brute with the flute (who resides on my
floor)

And the lodger upstairs (with the graces and airs),
And I *fear* me my kind little landlady too—
(It pains me extremely to mention her too !)
All joined in one loud, simultaneous—"Shoo!"
One highly indignant, entirely instinctive,
Ungentle, resentful, spontaneous—"Shoo!"
Yet !

(And here let it be noted how effectively I expend an entire line on a word of a single syllable to emphasize the supreme importance of the verses immediately following.)

Though the meanest gamin guy'd him—

(Mark this well, please !)

Though the meanest gamin guy'd him
With boo-hoos of execration,
And the noblest Duke decried him
With a smothered imprecation,
No obscurity shall hide him
From MY meed of veneration
In our artist's illustration,
For your earnest contemplation,
See the martyr'd saint enshrined !

Joe Skinner was a labourer,
A strong and lusty labourer,

A downright jovial, open-hearted, British working-man,
(And I love your genial, open-hearted, British working-
man !)

Therefore, think not I deride him,
When I say his face belied him,
For—let good or ill betide him !
It bespoke a gloomy mind,
A nasty, pessimistic, controversial turn of mind—
(And I loathe a pessimistic, controversial turn of mind !)

Still—although it marked dejection,
Indicating introspection
Grimly chronic and emphatic,
I have frequently opined
(Like my publisher's rejection
Pessimistic, systematic,
Of the odes I deem'd ecstatic,)
Much he wished it to be kind.
Yes, this cannot be denied him,
Even though you can't abide him,
He'd as good a heart inside him
As you'd ever wish to find

When the working population
Waxes fiercely democratic,
And in every branch and section,
Thanks to lack of trade protection,
(Or to alien immigration)
Funds are low and work erratic,
At my earnest instigation
Share my personal equation,
And survey with *delectation*

Joseph Skinner in his attic,
In his lonely little attic,
Bed-and-sitting room combined—
Breakfast - dining - drawing - dressing - bed - and - sitting
room combined.

Though ill-favouredly men eyed him
Wheresoever they espied him,
And the kindest vilified him
With a malice wholly blind ;
Nothing troubled him or tried him,
Gentlest thoughts preoccupied him,
And I beg your predilection
For a person so maligned.

Though I'm subject to correction,
Let me note in this connection,
That for every imperfection
I have oftentimes divined
Nature planned a compensation
Best adapted to our station
Or the humdrum occupation
Which our destiny assigned.

With this passing observation,
And this somewhat trite reflection,
(You will pardon the digression ?)
Let us take a peep behind
That unamiable expression
With which nature had supplied him
With a pre-determination
To be graciously inclined.

As the end and consummation
Of this wearisome laudation,
(This extravagant jobation,
Complicated and entwined.)
Let me feel that I provide him
With your love and approbation !
Though the world at large may chide him,
For YOUR earnest contemplation
In our artist's illustration
See the martyr'd saint enshrined !

PART THE SECOND

With a sneer
And a leer,
Saturnine and aggressive,
And wholly expressive of scorn,
With the stars in the Heavens
At sixes and sevens,
Joe Skinner, our hero, was born !
And his infantine lip was derisively curled
As he gazed with delight on the things of this world.

As he languished and pined for his nurse's embrace,
Or chortled and coo'd in his joy,
That worthy declared—to her lasting disgrace—
“ She *never* 'ad seen such a 'orrid grimace,
“ Such a double-dyed devil-may-care of a face ”
(I give you my word that it wasn't the case)
“ In a man—let alone of a boy ! ”

And though I maintain that the libel was base,
 Extremely offensive and *quite* out of place,
 The language his *father* thought fit to employ
 When first *he* encountered this sprig of his race,
 In a little white robe trimmed with valenciennes lace,
 Defies all description and limits of space.

But his mother—(Ah me ! what a world is express'd
 In that fair name of mother !) all fondly caressed
 The little bald head cuddled close to her breast,
 And the little pink toes,
 And the small waxen nose,
 And the poor little lip that derisively curled,
 And called him the bonniest babe in the world !

Yet the neighbours would say—in their neighbourly
 way—

(In their glib, *sotto voce*, mock-lachrymose way)

“ As 'ow the poor mite,
 “ They could weep at the sight,
 “ Growed more,
 more and more

Like 'is mother each day :

“ So fragile to look at, so puny in size,
 “ With the same little far-away look in 'is eyes,
 “ With the same timid spirit,
 “ The same wistful gaze,
 “ And the same little, dear little, meek little ways,
 “ And to mar all the lot—('twas exceedingly queer !)—
 “ The 'ole of 'is father summed up in a sneer.”

But—(as Joe Skinner *père* was entirely aware)—
 From a fighting Joe Skinner 'twas wisdom to bear

Any kind of a sneer with a diffident air :

“ For wasn’t ’e SKINNER THE SECOND—own
son

“ To ’is father afore ’im the great SKINNER ONE,

“ The Battersea Basher ” and “ second to none—”

“ As ’ad fought ’is fust battle

“ Afore ’e could walk,

“ An’ struck ’ome by instinct

“ Afore ’e could talk,

“ As ’ad whopped FIFTY ’eavyweight pugs in ’is
time,”

And who even to-day (though some years past his
prime)

Could tour with a circus,

Boomed, blazoned, and starred,

And offer, with swagger exceeding all bounds,

“ A cup as was valued at twenty-five pounds

“ To all as ud wenture—purfessionals barred—

“ To stand up agin ’im for three friendly rounds ? ”

But the way he said “ friendly ” was callous and hard,

And the yokels would say,

As they limped from the fray

In a dazed, incoherent, aggrieved kind of way,

“ As to use sich a word was too bloomin’ absurd

“ When they’d carry the marks to their last dyin’ day !

“ ’Twas a shame an’ a scandal a-lurin’ ’em there

“ On pertences like that, and a-callin’ it fair,

“ When just ONE of Old Joe’s famous knock-em-
down blows

“ On the chin, or the jaw, or the belt, or the nose,

“ Was more than a hev’ryday mortal could bear.

“AN’ ‘IM STANDIN’ GRINNIN’ TOO!—
 quite at ’is ease,
“An’ inwiteingly shoutin’ — ‘Next gen’leman
 please !’
“Why ’twas MURDER—no more and no less—so
 it were !”

Yet in Joe Skinner III.
It was painful to see
What a wisp of a fellow a Skinner could be,
And it grieves me too add
That the *sight* of the lad
Would enrage his papa in the highest degree :
“A durned little coward as dursn’t reply
“To the wags of the place
“As made fun of ’is face,
“But ud cling to ’is poor little mammie and cry,
“Was”— he *frequently* said so—
“A STANDIN’ DISGRACE
“As reflected on ’im an’ the ’ole Skinner race.”
(And indeed it was true
That the older he grew
The *more* on the least provocation he flew
To that good little woman for pity and care !)
Then the small boys around
Endless merriment found
In a one-sided pastime they called “’are an’ ’ound,”
But as poor little Skinner was *always* the hare
“’Twas a game ’as ’e simply jes’ couldn’t a-bear !”

As Skinner *père* drew an extremely good screw
He most wisely adopted the sensible view

Of putting aside all the cash he could spare
To bring out the *best* in his small son and heir :
“ Let the young un come ‘ome once a week for a
start,
“ But ‘e’d put un to school where ‘e’d ‘ave to be smart,
“ And fight ‘is own battles an’ take ‘is own part
“ With a pair o’ tight fists and a stout British ‘eart ;
“ Not takin’ things lyin’,
“ But boldly replyin’
“ To insults and jeers”—(which he very well knew
Every boy in the street with impunity threw
At the poor little man)—“ ‘ cos ‘is lip was askew.”
“ Such insults defyin’
“ Instead of jes’ flyin’
“ Like a whipped little cur to ‘is mother an’ cryin’,
“ As a true-‘earted Briton would *scorn* for to do !
“ Put *him* in his son’s place, *he’d* show who was who,
“ ‘E’d soon put a stop to their booin’ an’ guyin’.
“ ‘E’d larn ‘em a lesson ! ‘E’d knock out a few !
“ ‘E’d stand no blamed nonsense ! They’d soon tire
of tryin’
“ To persecute ‘im. ‘ Hit out quick and strike true ! ’
“ That was the course *he* was taught to pursue,
“ *That* was your only true wisdom worth buyin’,
“ And that was the larnin’ ‘is boy should ‘ave too ! ”

“ Let ‘is missus protest,
“ Which ‘e well knew she would,
“ But ‘twas all for the best,
“ And was done for ‘is good.
“ That—once and for all—must be *quite* understood !
“ He had made up *his* mind. ‘E wasn’t no fool,

“ So 'twas no use 'er sittin' there, sobbin' and sighin',

“ And a-wringin' 'er 'ands, and a-callin' 'im crool !

“ 'Eaven 'elp the good woman, *the boy wasn't dyin'*—

“ 'E was startin' in life *at a quid-a-week school!* ”

“ *At a quid-a-week school!* Let 'er ponder on that,

“ And 'for gentlemen's sons,' too !—the lucky young
brat !

“ *They'd* pretty soon larn 'im to give tit for tat.

“ Why, they'd make such a change in the poor little
worm

“ As she'd scarcely *believe* at the end o' the term.

“ 'Twas no use 'er pleadin'

“ An' makin' a row,

“ As if 'er intercedin'

“ Could alter 'im now.

“ No, 'e'd made up 'is mind, an' e' meant to stand
firm ! ”

“ Did 'e ever 'ave such a chance from 'is father ?

“ Wouldn't 'e just ha' jumped at the thought of it ?

“ R A T H E R !—

“ What did *she* think ? Why, o' course 'e would !

 Jump at it ?

“ JUMP at it !

“ 'E'd ha' turned fifty somersaults ! Bloomin' well
FLOWN at it !

“ And 'ere was 'is missus a-gettin' the 'ump at it,

“ Thinkin' it proper to blubber and moan at it !

“ Throwin' cold water on such a fine plan, too !

“ Was EVER such 'eartless ingratitude seen ?

“ Fifty good thick'uns *per annum* it ran to,

“ An' 'er settin' there, an' a-callin' 'im *mean* ! ”

- “ Not as ‘e cared a ‘ang if she thought fit to groan at it,
“ When HE made a start, ‘e just *carried* things
through.
- “ If he wanted a thing—well, he just went ‘right
plump at it,’
- “ That was *is* motter, AND a durned fine one too !
- “ Just LOOK at the chap ! Why, ‘e ‘adn’t enough
in ‘im
- “ To punish a *fly* as ud show any fight,
“ ‘Twas no good denyin’ it—kiddin’ an’ *bluffin’* ‘im ;
“ ‘E knowed what ‘e *knowed*, an’ ‘e knowed ‘e was
right !”
- “ Make life a bit rough
“ For the durned little muff,
- “ And ‘e’d turn out as good as ‘is father afore ‘im,
“ AND a credit and pride to the mother as bore ‘im.
- “ A few kicks and knocks,
“ That ud knock out the muff in ‘im !
- “ A daily set-*to*,
“ *That* ud bring out the stuff in ‘im.
- “ Delicate, was ‘e ?
- “ Well, school life would toughen ‘im !”
- “ Trust them sons o’ the gentry ! *They’d* soon larn
‘im ‘ow
- “ To put up ‘is dooks when it came to a row
- “ With the mean little scum as made game of ‘im
now.
- “ What HE wished to see was a Skinner the third,
- “ With a stout Skinner ‘eart in a stout Skinner frame,
- “ As ud ADD to ‘is father’s an’ grandfather’s fame,

“ An’ make every beggar turn tail when ’e came !
“ Not a cub as a cove need acknowledge with shame,
“ But a son as a SKINNER might even acclaim
“ As worthy alike of the breed and the name
“ (Could she *wonder* ’is fatherly feelin’s was stirred
“ When ’e tenderly, lovingly thought o’ the same ?) ”

“ Fifty thick’uns a year was a tidy big ’eap—
“ (There was some as might call it a trifle *too* steep)—
“ To pay for the little un’s schoolin’ an’ keep,
“ But ’e’d looked more than once afore takin’ the leap,
“ An’ e’d pay FIFTY MORE, AND consider it
 cheap
“ If it learnt the young shaver to make a clean sweep
“ Of the gutter-bred crew as presumed to make fun
“ Of a boy as was everywhere known as the son
“ Of Joe Skinner the second, and second to none !
“ She might sit there till Doomsday, an’ whimper an’
 weep,
“ But this whelp of a lion with the ’eart of a sheep
“ Was a blow to ’is pride as he felt very deep,
“ And a blow as ’e’d *parry*, whatever occurred !
“ A *Skinner* a skunk,
“ And a mean little funk !
“ ’Twas agin all tradition, an’ bloomin’ absurd ! ”

Whist !

(Never so gently now !)

Soft !

Not a word !

Not a sound at your peril !—(we mustn’t be heard.)
Let us fairly, warily, charily creep

Up the small attic flight,
Second door to the right,
To the wee fellow's bedside, and just steal a peep
At the poor little man as he lies there asleep.
What a theme for your cynic, my masters, is here !
This meek little mite,
So wan and so white,
So tender, so slender,
So puny and slight
That an adamant heart might be touched at the sight,
And that taunting, inimical, arrogant sneer !
Was *ever* adjustment so grossly unfair ?
From the crown of his head to the tip of his nose,
From his weak little chin to his ten little toes
One eloquent plea for protection and care,
And just that small lip with its meaningless leer
Sufficient to damn him wherever he goes !
What a theme for your cynic, my masters ? Ah me !
What a heartless old dramatist nature can be !

Though he wasn't to blame,
At school 'twas the same,
His chronic expression afforded rare game
To each tuppenny wit with a shaft to let fly
At the poor little beggar, too small to reply.—
And by scholar and teacher alike—to their shame—
In a Spartan endeavour his spirit to tame,
He was cuffed and abused, bullied and bruised,
In short altogether outrageously used :
And if on occasion he sought to know why—
(With a sneer on his lip, and a tear in his eye)
They thuswise expounded their virtuous aim :

“ They were hard with a purpose, and harsh to be kind.
“ ’Twas all for his good and extremely well meant,
“ And merely designed
“ With this object in mind :
“ To change his expression to one of content.”

Under pressure of penalties, firm and severe,
With this solace and cheer
He contrived for a year
By countless manœuvres to combat the sneer,
But his friendliest smile fell unheeded and flat—
Twas a menace at best—(and aggressive at that !)
And his pleasantest word, howsoever sincere,
That tyrannical lip would transform to a jeer
’Till sure he was fated
By all to be hated,
And bullied and beaten and badgered and baited,
And feeling at best like a trapped little rat,
Exposed to the view of each wayfaring cat,
The gloom of despair seized the lone little brat.
And I very much fear
It may pain you to hear
That contented no longer he tried to appear,
Though he quite understood
It was all for his good,
(I hope I have made this sufficiently clear ?)
And devised to inure
An ingenuus puer
To smile at, and smile at, and calmly endure
All the kicks and the knocks,
And the sorrows and shocks
Of a hand-to-mouth, happy-go-lucky career.

But if work days were sad for this slip of a lad,
I feel certain 'twill make you exceedingly glad
To know there was one day,
And that day a Sunday,
When things—on the whole—*weren't* so hopelessly bad.
When, indeed, at odd moments he almost forgot
His hard little, cramped little, sad little lot ;
When—(apart from the whacking received from his dad,
Due to Skinner the elder's peculiar fad
That all little boys, whether naughty or not,
Should partake of a weekly corrective served hot)—
Life, even for him, held one bright golden spot.
One day in the seven when the knocks and the kicks
And the sorrows and shocks of the other sad six
All changed in a moment to laughter and joy,
For mother, dear mother, was clasping her boy !
Ay, hugging him tight in a loving embrace,
And kissing his eager, upturned little face
As though, spite the lip that derisively curled,
'Twere the sweetest and bonniest face in the world !

Ah, that wonderful day !
Could my weak words convey
Just a twentieth part of the joy in my heart
As I covertly watch the young beggar at play,
Or—(with big wonder eyes, open wide with delight)—
All contentedly perched on his fond mother's knee,
Then—though all else in this poem were trite—
Never so, never so, never so trite—
What a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful,
WONDERFUL poem this poem would be !
But since my old quill has a wonderful way

Of declining to budge when I urge it to write
All the wonderful things I am yearning to say,
Will you please to *imagine* the wonderful sight,
And, stealing one-twentieth part of my joy,
Give a nod and a smile to the lone little boy ?

Such a bright little fellow, I give you my word,
Such a light-hearted, gay little Skinner the third,
With his eyes all aglow, and his little lip curled,
Just the brightest and bonniest boy in the world !
Now playing at horses, so joyously playing,
And stamping and prancing and kicking and neighing,
With his proud little mother—betwixt you and me—
Enjoying the fun
Even more than her son,
And both just as happy, as happy, as happy,
As happy, as happy, as happy can be.
With her reins and her whip, and her “Woa, Neddy,
woa !”
And her “Steady, my beauty !” and “Yoicks !
Tally Ho !”
Ah, *who* could help loving and petting and spoiling,
And tenderly guarding her wee little Joe,
Her own little, frail little, dear little Joe ?

But the saddest of all saddest days to recall
In the life of this sprig of humanity small
Is that day when he read
The scrawled message which said
That his dear little pal of a mother was dead.
(Alas, that this sorrow of sorrows should fall
On that meek unoffending, bowed-down little head !)

“ Yet he wasn’t to fret, or to mope, or to grieve,
 “ But accepting the blow as a true Skinner should
 “—With a stiff upper lip—do his best to believe
 “ As ’twas somehow or other devised for his good.
 “ Which,” as Joe *père* remarked, “ was the best tone
 to take
 “ When a feller ’ad summat unpleasant to break
 “ To a kid like ’is Joe—(with a ’alf-quid or so
 “ Enclosed in a letter to soften the blow ! ”)
 Lone, motherless mite, with the sad wistful eyes,
 Cold comfort to tell you that “ God understands ! ”
 Ah ! . . . well may you gaze at the answerless skies,
 Or bury that wee mocking face in your hands !

Gone !

Bolted !

Fled !

In the dawn, cold and grey,
 With a soft, nervous tread,
 At the first glimpse of day,
 From his hard little bed
 He had stolen away !
 Down the rickety stair,
 Whilst the other boys slept,
 He had stealthily

carefully

cautiously

crept,

Then—out through the window,
 The devil knew where !

Yet *I* happen to know—
 (Though they searched high and low

With unwavering zeal for a twelvemonth or so,
With never a sign of poor runaway Joe)—
That that hapless young shaver, ill-used and ill-fed,
Was a-learnin' 'is Lunnon and begging his bread,
Picking up an odd penny wherever he could,
And trying to believe, as a true Skinner should,
“As 'twas all for the best an' devised for 'is good”—
With his bruised little back ever turned to the wall,
And that damnable sneer the one cause of it all.

* * * * *

As the boy, so the man, save as years crept along
He grew gay and light-hearted, and sturdy and strong,
Though unaltered his fate,
For I grieve to relate
That things, now as ever, went hopelessly wrong.
Though he worked—when he could—with unfailing
good grace,
To apply for a job, with a sneer on his face,
And a look of disdain,
Made the kindest refrain
From giving the ill-fated beggar a place.
Then if to his comrades-in-sorrow he spoke,
Or ventured to crack an inspiriting joke,
They would all edge away
As much as to say,
“Well, *ain't* 'e a nasty sarkestical bloke !”

Yet he'd made up his mind
Since he never could find
One solution of life which he quite understood,
Just to take this on trust—as the best of us must—
“That 'twas somehow or other devised for 'is good.”

(Though in case this old saw
 Should unhappily draw
 From the learned and wise an impatient guffaw,
 Or a sceptical smile, let me hasten to add
 'Twas the sole consolation the old fellow had.)

And so, step by step, this untrumpeted saint
 Went steadily, steadily down to the end,
 With never a sigh or a word of complaint,
 With never a nod, or a smile, or a friend,
 Till we meet him at last a street-singer forlorn,
 With that look which he wore on the day he was
 born—

A leer
 And a sneer,
 Saturnine and aggressive,
 And wholly expressive of arrogant scorn,
 Of taunting, inimical, insolent, impudent,
 Militant, menacing, arrogant scorn !

Still !

(And here once again let it be noted how effectively I
 expend an entire line on a word of a single syllable
 to emphasize the supreme importance of the verses
 immediately following.)

Though the meanest gamin guy'd him—

(Mark this well, please !)

Though the meanest gamin guy'd him
 With boo-hoos of execration,
 And the noblest Duke decried him
 With a smothered imprecation,
 No obscurity shall hide him

From MY meed of veneration.
In our artist's illustration
For your earnest contemplation
See the martyred saint enshrined

Whist !
Never so gently now !
Soft !
Not a word !
Not a sound, my good masters !—(we mustn't be
heard,)
Let us fairly, warily, charily creep
Up the small attic flight,
Through the door on your right,
To the old fellow's bedside, and just steal a peep
At the gentle old man as he lies there asleep :
So good and kind-hearted, so meek and so mild,
With the face of a satyr, the heart of a child.
What a theme for your cynic, my masters ? Ah me !
What a heartless old dramatist nature can be !

THE END

POEMS IN DIVERS KEYS

AND

JOE SKINNER

OR, THE MAN WITH A SNEER

BY

ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN

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‘Nay. Enough. Enough.
In light of better wisdom, dearly gain'd,
Let men hereafter smile at that we did,
Made bold by faith and hope of serving them,
I would believe that nations yet enwomb'd,
In mystic brotherhood conjoin'd to us,
Shall be the stronger for our sacrifice.
I would beget this larger faith in thee,
That nought we do or suffer is in vain,
An that uncertain light vouchsaf'd to us
Commend our enterprise : that nought of pith soe'er
Shall in the ultimate miscarry all,
That once held power to animate men's hearts,
And lift their souls to voluntary act,

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How weary long the waiting. Needs must we esteem
The genius of the age, set over us,
The seer and oracle to be obey'd.
Thus would I believe, and die in voicing it.'

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'Our wills are leashed by circumstance,
And fools would venture not could fools foresee.
But shift responsibility to Heaven,
And nought we will or do or dream's amiss.
The which is soothing sophistry for fools,
Or wisdom's last pronouncement.'

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